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**The Vocational Education Association
of the Middle West**

MAKING AMERICAN INDUSTRY SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY

RUTH MARY WEEKS

BULLETIN NO. 5, OCTOBER, 1918

**1225 Sedgwick Street
CHICAGO**

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MAKING AMERICAN INDUSTRY SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY

RUTH MARY WEEKS

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(Read at the Convention of the Vocational Education Association of the
Middle West, Chicago, January 25, 1918)

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MAKING AMERICAN INDUSTRY SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY.

The last twenty-five years have seen a greater improvement in the character and equipment of American teachers than in the personnel of any other learned profession. Never have professional standards been so high in colleges, high schools, grade schools and kindergartens, as well as in vocational branches; and constant checking up by trained supervisors and efficiency experts keeps the city teacher, at least, on his mettle and energetically employing the whole of his new professional resources. Educational ideas, too, have undergone in the last twenty-five years an equally impressive revolution. First came the kindergarten with its study of child nature; then manual training with its emphasis on the all around development of personality; next vocational training and vocational guidance with their insistence on the duty of the school to prepare for actual wage earning life; and now the Dewey, Montessori and Gary systems of school administration, making of school not only a preparation for life but a world in miniature. Never have subjects been so well and attractively taught in their respective class rooms; never has the trend of educational thought been so close to daily life and daily needs.

And it is fortunate that this is so, for never has the task confronting a school system been so complicated, so vital and stupendous as it is in America today; never has any teaching body stood so much in need of skill and vision, technique and imagination, factual knowledge and social ideals. Not only is the mechanism of modern life more complicated than that for which our school program was originally drafted, but politically, industrially, culturally and religiously, America, like all the world, is facing a readjustment of forces and ideals; and to America the nations look for the democratic program on which the coming years can build the structure of a liberal and harmonious international life. We live in stirring times. Little by little, century by century, humanity has progressed nearer to the vision of a world in which, free of tyranny and oppression, free of bigotry and intolerance, free of poverty and ignorance, each soul shall reach the full fruition of its individual powers. Abolition of slavery and social caste, religious freedom, universal suffrage, popular education, and government recognition of the right of labor to a living and a life—these were democratic gains of which America was proud. But even here the goal was not yet won; and we scarcely saw as yet the full meaning of the word democracy. Then suddenly came the war, waking us from our self-satisfaction, rousing us to a new love and understanding of democracy. Now the burden has fallen upon America; President Wilson's great phrase, "Make the world safe for democracy," rings across two continents, a new

battle cry of freedom; and to America the nations look not only for the final military victory but for the democratic example, which shall justify the cause for which we fight by its practical results. We have as Americans not only to strive for freedom on the shell-torn fields of France, but to establish democracy on our own soil there to stand as a model and shining inspiration to the world.

And that is why I have chosen for my subject today making American industry safe for democracy. Industry is the backbone of our national life; yet is American industry really democratic? Can we point to it at the close of the war as the model for the reconstruction of international industrial affairs? What is our present industrial situation? We have indeed federal child labor laws upon our statutes prohibiting interstate traffic in articles manufactured by child labor; but these laws do not apply to industries which cater to a local market, and in many a state children are still employed, notably in the street trades so dangerous alike to life and limb and character, so obstructive of vocational advancement. Is this democracy? We have long known that no woman can live safely and decently on less than eight dollars a week in normal times; yet the average wage of working women in this country at the outbreak of the war was nearer six—and it is doubtful if the subsequent advance in earnings has kept pace with war prices closely enough to change the situation. Is that democracy? In a well-known county in Colorado, a great corporation elected, owned and operated every public official in the district, including the judge in whose courts cases between the company and its employees were tried. Was that democracy? And when the very understandable discontent with this and other conditions of these employees' life and work culminated in trade union agitation, a long and bloody strike ensued because the corporation refused to meet with, treat with or recognize the collective elected representatives of their employees. Was that democracy? It was my privilege to act in a very modest intermediary capacity in a recent street railway strike in my own city. The justice of the strikers' claims were conceded even by the company itself, but the strike lasted two long weeks, in which not a street car operated on that city's streets, simply because the company refused to meet with and treat with its employees collectively. A railway man from another state who came to help the local company in handling the strike, said to me, "It is the same thing everywhere—turbulence, violence, anarchy."

"Yes," I replied, "it is the same thing everywhere, but you would get along better in meeting the situation if instead of saying 'Turbulence,' you would say 'Democracy.'"

Mr. Hard, writing in the *New Republic*, says: "A man acquainted with political affairs who will spend three months in Washington meeting business men coming on war work to the national capital from all parts

of the U. S. would find it difficult not to conclude that American business men all in all are the most reactionary class of industrial rulers in the civilized world. For an astonishing number of them, the whole labor movement, which has given us trade union cabinets in every country in Europe and a labor man prime minister of England, is not a movement at all but only a 'trouble.' The very same democratic impulse which is shaking and remaking the world thrusts a finger in their factories and they see nothing but labor troubles invented by irrelevant outside agitators." Our business men are sincerely patriotic and enthusiastic for political democracy. The president of the very street railway company of which I spoke had left his lucrative position to volunteer in the army and, perhaps, to give his life for the cause of democracy; yet he left the army camp where he was stationed and came home to break that strike without once realizing that there was anything inconsistent in his attitude. Indeed, he asked permission (of course, not granted) to bring his regiment with him to protect imported strike-breakers on the company cars! As one labor leader put it, he returned bringing the sword of freedom in one hand the lash of industrial oppression in the other. The terrible story of East St. Louis is still vivid in our minds—the story of how the bitterness of industrial conflict and the stupidity of race prejudice culminated in a night of savagery which a Kansas City press representative who was present at the outbreak characterized as worse than Belgium. Have we in America today industrial democracy? I hold no brief for organized labor. Let us look at the other side of the picture. Two years ago saw the passage of the Adamson act, whose provisions most of you will approve, but whose method of passage many will deplore. Refusing to arbitrate, using its new power of organization, labor fell back upon the stone age argument of force, and *compelled* the passage of the measure. It is not hard to see where labor learned this lesson; but such methods in labor's hands are no more democratic than capitalistic domination.

No! American industry is not yet a democratic institution; but it is destined so to be, and the problem of public education is to make it safely, sanely and efficiently so.

There are two industrial changes which we must anticipate; of which the signs are rife; for which we must prepare our pupils: the socialization of production to a much greater extent than we have been accustomed to expect, and the democratization of industry by giving the workers a share in the direction of business. Evidences of the socialization of industry meet us on every hand. Municipal ownership of light, water, gas, street railways, etc.; government ownership of natural resources and of the parcel post; government control of mining, food production and distribution, transportation and war industries; government regulation of hours of labor, rates of pay, and labor conditions; government provision for accident in-

urance—all these are very positive socialization—direct or indirect—of industrial processes. We are living under a progressively socialized system of production where the general public as voters exercise more and more supervision over, if they do not actually conduct, business enterprises. And it is reasonable to suppose that the vast centralization of transportation, commerce, agriculture and industry here and abroad which has arisen as a war economy will remain in part at least at its close as the natural productive system of a social world.

Judge Brandeis offered an interesting opinion as to the democratization of industry by giving the workers a share in the direction of business, in his testimony before the Industrial Commission as to the causes of industrial unrest. "My observation leads me to believe that while there are many causes contributing to unrest, there is one cause which is fundamental, and that is the conflict between our political liberty and our industrial absolutism. Every man has a voice in the government, but industry has been a state within a state, an absolutism in which the worker has no vote. This absolutism may be benevolent, but none the less he has no voice in determining the conditions under which he works, the pay he receives or the general conduct of the business. Yet these are not purely the employers' problems; they are the problems of the trade, of both employer and employee. Division of profits is not enough; there must be division of responsibility; and the men must have the opportunity of deciding in part what shall be their condition and how the business shall be run. They also as a part of that responsibility must learn that they must bear the fatal results of mistakes, just as the employers do. Unless we establish some such industrial democracy, unrest will not only continue, but in my opinion will grow worse." This is not the utterance of a radical, but of a member of the most conservative corporation in the U. S., our Supreme Court. Evidence that this industrial democracy, of which Judge Brandeis speaks, is on the way is not so far to seek. Examples of profit sharing too numerous to mention show that even the capitalist recognizes the rights of workers to be larger than we had supposed. We read of the establishment of co-operative enterprises, especially on the Pacific Coast. And last but not most significant, the power of organized labor in determining business policy through collective bargaining and through the exertion of such political influence as secured the passage of the Adamson Act is proof positive that whether we like it or not, a new element is entering the industrial councils of the nation.

But how well are the graduates of our public schools prepared to assume their share in the direction of socialized and democratized industry? This new democratization takes place, this new responsibility falls upon them at a time when owing to the decay of apprenticeship and to the specialization of industrial processes, industry can train neither its skilled opera-

tives nor its managers. Vocational education is the response to the need of industry for operatives; technical schools are the response to the need for skilled directors. But now operatives must share in business management. What answer shall we school people make to this new need of democratic industry?

Shall we train our children, as we are more and more urged to do by so-called practical people (especially now in war times when the cry for new workers is so loud), simply in the use of a single specialized machine? How intelligent will be the contribution to business management of a man who does nothing day in day out but operate a button hole machine in a shoe factory? Yet as a member of a trade union or as a voter in a community where franchises are up for approval, he is as surely contributing that share as though he had been educated for the responsibility. One who visits, even in sympathetic mood, trade union meetings cannot but be struck with the one-sided character of their deliberations. The worker sees his own corner of the industrial world with terrible clearness; but modern industry does not give the all-round view. A board of directors' meeting exhibits the same phenomenon. And here let me say that a teacher today, especially a teacher of a vocational subject, has no business on the pay roll of an up-to-date school system if he does *not* mingle with labor, work now and then in the type of factory for which he is preparing his pupils, attend trade union meetings, learn at first hand what are the interests, activities, problems, and deficiencies of the working man. The progressive teacher will likewise seek to meet with employers of labor to learn their problems too. He will in short keep himself in first hand contact with the world.

General trade instruction of the orthodox type giving the pupil an all around understanding of all the processes of a trade, though perhaps not a high degree of skill in any one, is better for our present purpose. But even such trade courses are largely confined to the factory side of industry. Trade schools seldom study business; they study mechanics. They make a good worker. Do they make an intelligent trade unionist? An intelligent industrial democrat?

How then shall we give this training for participation in the responsibilities of democratic industry? Two methods have been suggested: direct instruction in elementary economics and industrial organization, and indirect imparting of the same material in connection with personal studies. Professor Leavitt, formerly of the Chicago School of Education, has worked out a scheme for direct instruction in such problems in connection with the prevocational classes at the Lane Technical High School in Chicago, and I believe that an elementary text book on economic organization, embodying the results of this experiment, is about to appear upon the market. I am not sure as to the feasibility of such direct instruction in the grammar grades, but it is certainly only a matter of time till popular courses in

economics and sociology will be offered in every up-to-date high or trade school. As to the matter of indirect instruction in the lower grades, I am very sanguine. So far, we have done little for our grade school pupils to familiarize them with those economic forces that will control practically all their later life. But in the course of our teaching of reading and writing, history and geography, arithmetic, art, and manual training, can we not indirectly give them some intelligent idea of the modern world? Are land, labor and capital, rent and interest, our industrial organization, specialization, and the inter-dependence of man on man, industry on industry, locality on locality, nation on nation, such abstruse ideas that the seventh grade child cannot work out in games at least some notion of these fundamental aspects of our modern life? How this is to be done I am not prepared today to tell you in detail, although I am at work upon a program for the adaptation of grade school subjects to this pressing demand of contemporary life. But I wish today to ask your co-operation in the solution of the problem. It is too great to be solved by one man alone. Each teacher must make a contribution. In your teachers' meetings, in your daily work, in your conversation with your fellow workers, ask "How well are my pupils prepared for industrial democracy?" For fitted they must be if either politics or industry is to be made safe for democracy; if trade union action is to be sane and intelligent; if popular legislation is to be productive of prosperity; if municipal and government ownership are to become more than a by-word for inefficiency. The day is past to argue for or against government ownership and trade unions. Government ownership is here with its demand upon civic intelligence; trade unionism is here with all its power. And it is the business of the public school to make government ownership efficient and trade unionism safe by education. Every age creates its own tools; our age has created the monopoly and the trade union. It is through these we must work. To fight either is to fall back into the ranks of those whose life work goes uselessly into dead issues. To use and control them for social progress is the task of constructive education. We have before us an example of a nation failing for lack of educative preparation. Russia, poor, tortured Russia; look at Russia, says your reactionary; there is democracy; is that the type of government we want? But Russian blundering is not the outgrowth of democracy, but the heritage of Tsardom. Russia sowed the wind and she reaped the whirlwind; Russia sowed autocracy and she reaped the revolution; Russia sowed tyranny and persecution and she reaped anarchy; Russia sowed ignorance and she reaped the Bolsheviki. We in America have seen that crop. We have sowed industrial ignorance and we have reaped the I. W. W. And the cure for that evil is not the jail but the school house.

Industry, then, alone can never give the connected view of industry as a whole which is necessary for the safe and successful conduct of an industrial democracy. On the one hand industry produces the capitalist,

separated from personal contact with his men; regarding them more or less inevitably as mere cogs in the machine; feeling toward the labor organizer who comes into his factory much the same sense of personal outrage as he would toward a man who dared to meddle with his own private and particular wife. Government control he has come to understand; he sees that somehow his business is the public's business as well. But that it is the business of his employees he cannot understand. On the other hand, industry produces the labor organization which with growing power, submits less and less willingly to arbitration. On the one hand, the capitalist who talks about *his* business; on the other hand, labor which talks about its rights.

Public education exists to reconcile such conflicts. Let us, therefore, strive to evolve a schedule to fit not only for earning a living but for playing a part in a democratized and socialized industry that will be the inspiration and example for the economic order of a federated world. Let us as American teachers strive that in American industry at least, through unpreparedness, ignorance and inefficiency, government of the people, by the people and for the people shall *not* perish from the earth!

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